NCRI
NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

COMBAT ANTISEMITISM MOVEMENT

THE "SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN"

UNITING EXTREMIST GROUPS IN THE REVIVAL OF AN ANTISEMITIC LIBEL ONLINE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Mentions of "synagogue" on Twitter have doubled on average since October 2022, with surges in negative sentiment for comments containing the term during the same period.

- The "Synagogue of Satan'' is an antisemitic libel, accounting lately for nearly 20% of all comments mentioning the term "synagogue" on Twitter and is often accompanied by calls for direct action.

- While Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader, has been the most influential account for disseminating the term, controversies involving rapper Kanye West and basketball player Kyrie Irving have revived the trope. QAnon influencers, Christian nationalists, White nationalists, Black Hebrew Israelites, and Nation of Islam accounts all amplify the term and its associated antisemitic narratives.

- Earlier this year, the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) published a report examining the targeting of synagogues during the first two months of 2023. The study found 33 monitored incidents antisemitic incidents in which Jewish institutions were targeted globally – 12 of which were U.S. synagogues. This marked a 71.4% increase from the seven such incidents involving U.S. synagogues during the corresponding time period the previous year.

- Use of "Synagogue of Satan" on Twitter is spatially correlated to synagogue vandalism and threats at the county level in the U.S.

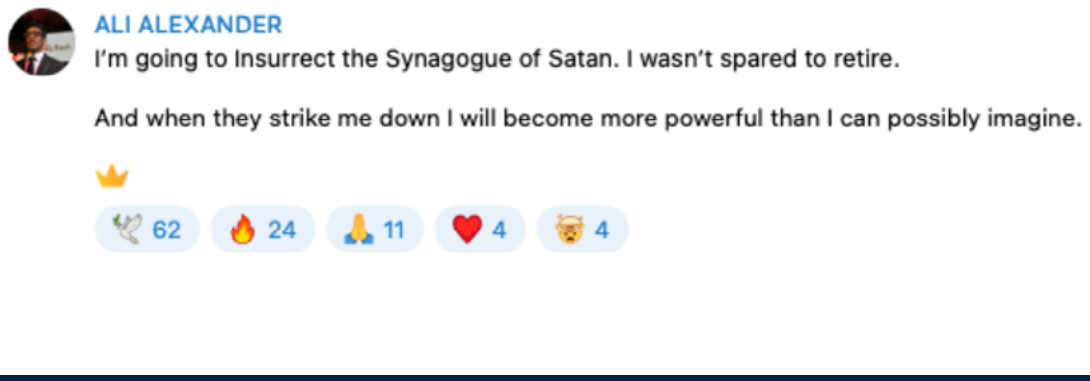

Figure 1: A tweet by Ali Alexander referencing 'Synagogue of Satan' posted on 11/18/2022.

INTRODUCTION: THE EXTREMIST ADOPTION OF THE "SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN" - SHARED MESSAGING BY NATION OF ISLAM, BLACK HEBREW ISRAELITE, AND QANON GROUPS

The term "Synagogue of Satan" has its roots in Christian antisemitic libel and has found purchase across numerous modern conspiracy groups, often depicting Jews as satanic conspirators who seek to control the world. The phrase is derived from the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, specifically Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, which portrays Jewish opponents as inauthentic arch-enemies with secret loyalty to the Devil. The term has been used to incite violence against Jews throughout history and shows prominent use by modern extremist Christian nationalists, and it is growing today into a point of common convergence and "bridge building" across extremists groups.

Figure 2: A tweet by The Nation of Islam using 'Synagogue of Satan' implies Billy Graham and President Nixon were antisemitic.

This "bridge building" is especially evident online. In March 2018, for example, Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, a Black nationalist and antisemitic organization, posted a video on his social media accounts in which he quoted Christian preacher Billy Graham using the term "Synagogue of Satan" in a conversation with then-President Richard Nixon in 1971. [1]Farrakhan has more recently deployed the trope and Graham's/Nixon's link to it to call for a "War of Armageddon"[2] against Jews and to accuse Jews of controlling the media, banking, and government. This demonstrates how the trope can be skillfully used to point out common ground with potential allies by identifying an ultimate enemy. Analysis of the most engaged "Synagogue of Satan'' tweets since 2018 shows Farrakhan's acumen with the term and the

[1] *https://currentpub.com/2022/10/27/the-nixon-library-has-released-another-recording-in-which-billy-graham-and-richard-nixon-discuss-jews-and-the-synagogue-of-satan/*
[2] *https://twitter.com/LouisFarrakhan/status/1630981165342392345?lang=en*

impact his rhetoric has had on the trope: 50% of the most popular posts on the platform that use the term are either by him, or reference him directly.

In addition to the Nation of Islam, other extremist groups such as Black Hebrew Israelites have also adopted the "Synagogue of Satan" trope[3]. Black Hebrew Israelites (BHI) have a long history of promoting antisemitic views, accusing Jews of being satanic impostors and believing their sect to be the true descendants of the ancient Israelites. The recent controversies involving Kanye West and Kyrie Irving, with some specifically featuring the "Synagogue of Satan" trope, have been adopted as a shared grievance by BHI audiences as the influencers promoted conspiracy theories that echo the BHI's own beliefs. Irving's use of the "Synagogue of Satan" phrase in a social media post, while disseminating BHI propaganda, shows how mainstream influencers in sports and music now signal their affinity for the dangerous trope. More recently, far-right influencer Ali Alexander, who is involved in Kanye West's 2024 presidential campaign, has also invoked the trope on numerous occasions, even "declaring a crusade on the Synagogue of Satan."

Finally, influencers typically associated with QAnon, a far-right conspiracy theory group, have also adopted the "Synagogue of Satan" trope and used it to promote their own antisemitic beliefs. QAnon followers believe in a range of outlandish conspiracy theories, including the idea that a secret cabal of global elites, including Jewish financiers, are responsible for a range of societal ills. This belief has led QAnon followers to frequently use the "Synagogue of Satan" phrase as a way of accusing Jews of being part of a sinister plot to control the world. For example, former U.S. National Security Advisor Mike Flynn, recently tweeted a video stating that the "Khazarian Mafia," connected to another antisemitic conspiracy theory, along with the "Synagogue of Satan," are the world's "puppet masters." Flynn was a central figure in the QAnon conspiracy movement, and once took the "QAnon Oath" with his family in a video he posted on social media. Flynn has millions of followers across social media platforms.

Historic Oregon synagogue becomes target of anti-Semitic attack

In a letter to congregants, the rabbi vows: "We will not be deterred. We will not be made to feel unsafe in our own house of worship."

Figure 3: A recent attack against a synagogue in Oregon is just one of many in recent months.

[3] *https://www.businessinsider.com/brooklyn-nets-denounce-kyrie-irving-promoting-antisemitic-film-2022-10?utm_campaign=sf-bi-main&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com*

REVIVAL OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN TROPE - KYRIE IRVING AND KANYE WEST

Recent work by the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) has demonstrated sharp increases in recent months on attacks against synagogues. The study found 33 monitored incidents antisemitic incidents in which Jewish institutions were targeted globally during the first two months of 2023 – 12 of which were U.S. synagogues. This marked a 71.4% increase from the seven such incidents involving U.S. synagogues during the corresponding time period the previous year (see examples in Appendix 1).

Vandals scrawl 'Hitler' on New York City synagogue

Rabbi finds graffiti on outside wall of Brooklyn's Congregation Beth Shalom, as antisemitic crime rate remains high in city

By LUKE TRESS

18 August 2022, 12:18 am | 2

Figure 4: A New York City synagogue is one of many synagogue vandalisms

Given the acceleration of these attacks, NCRI and CAM performed an online analysis to examine whether cyber social signals, mentions of synagogues, or negative sentiment expressed in comments about synagogues might be on the rise as well. It is important to contextualize these hostilities, because they can be predictive of real world vandalism or attacks. They also delineate and better characterize chatter and grievances associated with hostile ideologies more broadly.

Figure 5: The number of tweets including 'synagogue' and 'satan' have increased in recent months. The vertical dashed lines indicate incidents of vandalism at synagogues

In recent months, an increase has been identified in the use of the term "Synagogue of Satan" on Twitter (figure 5). NCRI overlaid synagogue vandalism incidents (dashed lines) in the graph above (figure 5). Though previous work by NCRI and CAM has demonstrated increases in antisemitic rhetoric occuring on Twitter after Elon Musk's purchase of the platform[4] and incitement by Kanye West, a timeline analysis of nearly 23,000 tweets mentioning the term reveals a pronounced increase in the use of this particular antisemitic trope.

NCRI's timeline analysis indicates that the resurgence of the "Synagogue of Satan" trope began to surge at the onset of the Kanye West controversy in October and then spiked to over 500% of its previous baseline with the suspension of Kyrie Irving. These spikes in the use of the term appeared to correspond with Black Hebrew Israelite and White supremacist reactivity to Kyrie Irving and Kanye West, resulting in the sustained growth of the term, which remains elevated at ~2X baseline of its previous levels on Twitter. Furthermore, though only a small proportion of users who employed the trope provided location data (>10%) an analysis of location data from these users suggests a disproportionately high prevalence for U.S.-based accounts for the use of the term (Figure 6).

[4] *https://networkcontagion.us/reports/2-8-23-twittertakeover-how-the-musk-acquisition-became-a-launchpad-for-gen-z-neo-nazis-ye-and-widespread-antisemitism/*

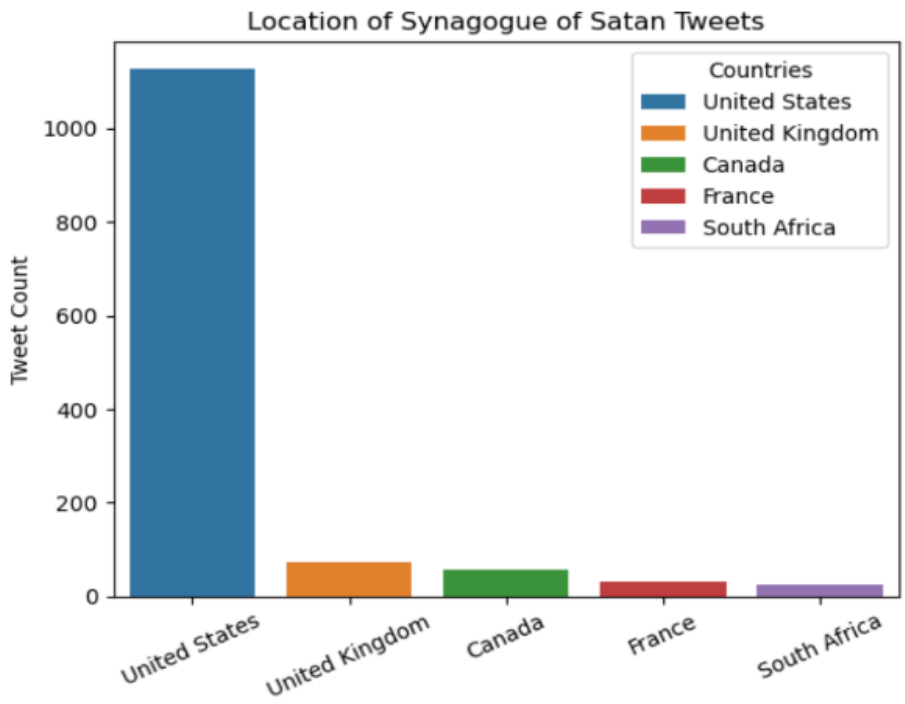

Figure 6: An analysis of tweets containing 'synagogueof satan' shows the majority come from US accounts (out of those users who reported their location).

Next, a sentiment analysis was conducted on the term "synagogue" on Twitter (blue) as well as the percentage of "synagogue" tweets that also include the term "Satan." The analysis (figure 7) depicts substantial spikes in the percentage of negative sentiment tweets (rating at over 0.5 for Vader negativity) containing the word "synagogue" both during and after the West/Irving events. The figure also depicts a sustained rise in the percentage of "synagogue" tweets that also include the term "satan" from ~5% to ~15%, occasionally reaching over 20% of all comments. Given these substantial increases in sentiment and use of the conspiracy, we next sought to delineate the nature and extent of the conspiracy.

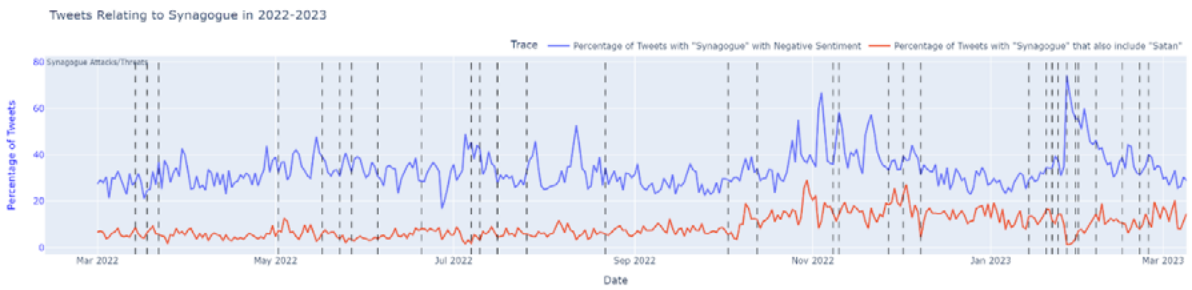

Figure 7: A timeline of tweets containing 'synagogue' that have a negative sentiment (blue) and tweets containing both 'synagogue' and 'satan' (red) show increases. The dashed vertical lines indicate attacks and threats against synagogues.

"THE WAR OF ARMAGEDDON" - HOW DIFFERENT GROUPS DEPLOY THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN: FROM FARRAKHAN TO FLYNN

Open source intelligence gathering was performed on the proliferation of the "Synagogue of Satan" concept on Twitter to understand the themes and components of the conspiracy and delineate how the term is deployed by the Black Hebrew Israelites, Nation of Islam, QAnon-related groups and white supremacists. While these groups are all distinct, NCRI notes a convergence of the same themes around the use of "Synagogue of Satan":

- **Supersession (Replacement)**
- **Secret or Occult Cabals**
- **Apocalyptic Thinking**
- **Calls for Action/Revolution**

It is notable in these cases, from Farrakhan to Flynn, the "Synagogue of Satan" meme often points toward a necessity for insurrection or direct action.

REFERENCES TO THE "SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN": QANON-RELATED GROUPS, NOI, FAR RIGHT, BHI

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Flynn

Figure 8: Lt. General Mike Flynn's tweet referencing a post containing 'synagogue of satan' by a conspiracy website called DailyNoahNews.

On March 27th 2023, former U.S. National Security Advisor and QAnon influencer Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mikel Flynn, in a post that received over 1 million views, quote-tweeted a post from DailyNoahNews, a conspiracy website posing as a news organization. The post laments the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy Jr., a common topic for conspiracy theories, and depicts video of a brightly-labeled banner "Fake Jews and the Synagogue of Satan," along with terms related to the Khazarian narrative – the antisemitic, supersessionist myth that the Jewish people are descendants of impostors.

The video characterizes a secret cabal of "puppet masters'' behind the murder of Kennedy. NCRI analysis suggests that QAnon lore acts as a meta-conspiracy that often absorbs competing narratives to expand shared audience and in recent years has embraced the Kennedy assassination conspiracy, which has always enjoyed notoriety among conspiracy theorists. Flynn warns in his tweet, "Wake up county class, because they are coming for you next" which, in the context of his antisemitic post, serves both to depict Jewish conspirators as an imminent, murderous threat to the nation, as well as to call for "local action."

Though the tweet demonstrates how the "Synagogue of Satan" meme bridges conspiracy communities and communicates overarching threats of secret cabals and the urgency of real world and local action, how is this material received and amplified? Using Botometer[7], a graph analysis shows intensive amplification of this tweet by likely-inauthentic accounts (red), suggesting bot-like activity may play a role in the revival of "Synagogue of Satan'' (Figure 9). That QAnon influencers are seizing on the synagogue meme, connecting it to other conspiracies and successfully amplifying it – the tweet was in the top 10% of most engaged material by Flynn – is a concerning signal. It shows that the meme can be a "winner" in building conspiratorial audiences.

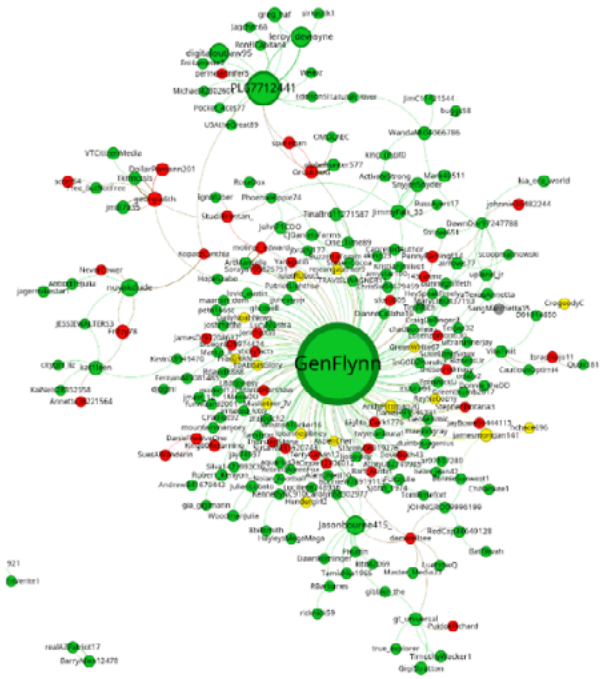

Figure 9: A graph depicting the amplification of Lt. General Flynn's tweet show a number of potential bot accounts in red.

[5] *https://networkcontagion.us/reports/the-qanon-conspiracy-destroying-families-dividing-communities-undermining-democracy/*
[6] *https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/qanon-kennedy-jfk-jr-dealey-plaza-dallas-1251929/*
[7] *https://botometer.osome.iu.edu/*

Louis Farrakhan

Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, a Black nationalist and religious organization, is the most prodigious influencer with over 376,000 followers on Twitter for the "Synagogue of Satan'' meme, and has, throughout his career, used the meme specifically to bridge the gap across a range of aggrieved and marginalized communities who may feel disenfranchised by mainstream institutions. The framing of the meme in his message serves to challenge established power structures and draw parallels between the struggles faced by different groups in a common struggle. His tweets include video clips like, “The War of Armageddon has Begun,” along with calls to action to “take on the Synagogue of Satan,” comporting with key themes of apocalyptic thinking, calls for action, and secret power.

Figure 10: Louis Farrakhan frequently mentions ‘synagogue of satan’ in his tweets.

Farrakhan's historical use of the term during highly-attended and viewed speeches shows a clear pattern of bridge building:

- In 1985, addressing a crowd of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans at Madison Square Garden, he depicted the "Synagogue of Satan," in a call for unity among oppressed groups, as a wicked cabal controlling the government in their joint oppression.[8]
- In 1996, he also made use of the meme in outreach to the Muslim community while embarking on an "international friendship tour" that included stops in Iran, Iraq, and Libya. Criticizing U.S. treatment of Muslims, he blamed the "Synagogue of Satan" as the singular force oppressing African Americans and Muslims alike.[9]
- In 2006, during the Millions More March, which sought to build a coalition between African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, women, and the poor, Farrakhan called for unity against the "Synagogue of Satan" as the key meeting point of their shared grievance[10].
- Farrakhan has used the meme to make outreach to the Black Lives Matter movement recently, expressing sympathy for their objectives and providing advice. In a lecture from 2015, he compared the difficulties of Palestinians with African Americans, asserting that both populations were afflicted by the "Synagogue of Satan."[11]

Kyrie Irving

Kyrie Irving, a professional basketball star with over 4.7 million Twitter followers then playing for the Brooklyn Nets famously Tweeted out in support of "Hebrew to Negroes" a BHI-inspired film which uses the "Synagogue of Satan" trope to criticize Jews for exploiting African Americans for personal gain. The story sparked widespread outrage and criticism from a variety of individuals and groups, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

The potential harm that such contentious language may inflict, especially when shared by a popular figure with such a substantial following is challenging to resolve. Though Irving eventually apologized on Instagram, this apology was itself deleted and his recent controversial behavior appears to have been catalytic for resurrecting the prominence of the "Synagogue of Satan" in mainstream discourse and the term is now freely used by more high profile influencers."

Ali Alexander

Alexander, a far-right American political analyst and social media personality, known for his controversial statements and propagation of conspiracy theories, has also invoked the "Synagogue of Satan'' trope on Telegram on numerous occasions. Last year, Alexander stated he was going to "insurrect the Synagogue of Satan" to his nearly 20k followers on Telegram. In a separate post, Alexander declared a "crusade" against the "Synagogue of Satan."

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[8] https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA687142139&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=27067645&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7Ef4ad3dcd
[9] https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/nation-islam
[10] https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/farrakhan-million-man-march-textual-authentication/
[11] https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/minister-louis-farrakhan-in-his-own-words
[12] https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/kyrie-irving-boosts-antisemitic-movie-peddling-jewish-slave-ships-theory-1234620125/

Alexander was instrumental in organizing and publicizing the "Stop the Steal" movement in the run-up to the insurgency at the United States Capitol on January 6th, 2021. Through numerous events, particularly in the social cyber domain, he has been perceived by numerous analysts and reports as a critical instigator of protest activities and real-world violence. Alexander's appeals for action and promotion of conspiracy theories around the 2020 U.S. presidential election contributed to a climate of heightened tension and mistrust, which culminated in the January 6th violence. In this context, Alexander's use of threatening language, such as referencing the "Synagogue of Satan" and calling for a "crusade" and to “insurrect” against it, carries particular weight, raising worries about the possible real-world ramifications of his online rhetoric for Jewish communities.

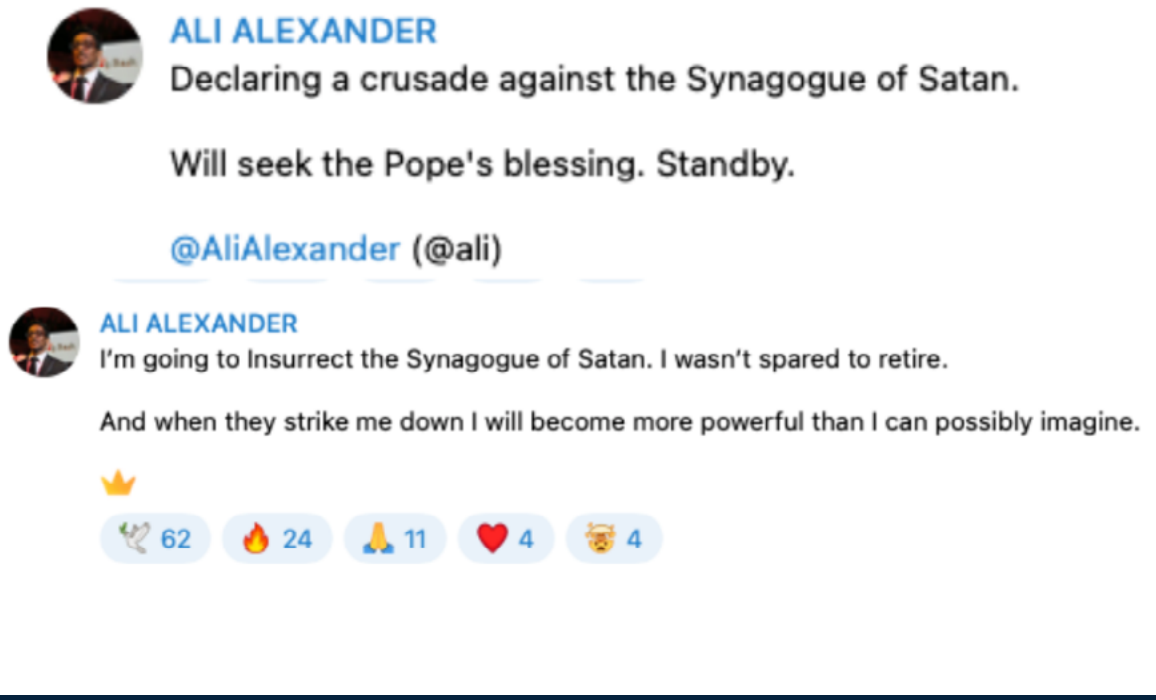

Figure 11: Notable Telegram posts by Ali Alexander referencing ‘synagogue of satan’.

"SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN" USE ON TWITTER CORRELATES WITH REAL WORLD SYNAGOGUE ATTACKS.

Because "Synagogue of Satan" tweets often accompany calls for direct action from notable influencers across Twitter, the next step was to examine the spatial signature of tweets containing the term in the U.S. on the county level to determine whether these tweets might correlate to real-world synagogue attacks. An ordinary least squares (OLS) spatial regression model, which is a statistical tool commonly used to analyze relationships between variables, shows that the term significantly correlates with synagogue incidents, an effect that remains robust even when controlling for population and baseline, county levels of antisemitic activity.

It's important to note that these analyses don't permit inference of cause – defaced synagogues may be inspiring this antisemitic cyber-social signal as opposed to tweets "causing" the vandalism. Another limitation is that "Synagogue of Satan"' tweets are likely a subcategory reporting on antisemitic sentiment more broadly, and antisemitic sentiment itself may underlie real-world events more cleanly. The evidence of relationality in this analysis, however, justifies a deeper investigation of signals intelligence to determine how strongly antisemitic cyber social signals predict real-world harms to vulnerable communities.

VARIABLES	Synagogue Incidents
Twitter Posts ("Synagogue of Satan")	0.008** (0.0014)
Population	1.516e-07** (1.13e-08)
ADL Antisemitic Incidents (2022)	0.0042** 0.0003
Constant	-0.016** (0.0026)
Observations	3,108
Adjusted R-squared	0.3569
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-3,506.186

Coefficients are linear and unstandardized. Standard errors in parentheses.
** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Figure 12: Ordinary Least Squares Regression examining how population and mentions of "synagogue of satan" predict spatial distribution of synagogue vandalisms and attacks.

CONCLUSION:

This dangerous "Synagogue of Satan" narrative has transcended traditional ideological boundaries, serving as a unifying theme among diverse extremist groups. While a causal link between this online rhetoric and real-world violence, vandalism or threats cannot be conclusively established, the correlation between the two is concerning and the potential impact of such a toxic narrative should not be underestimated. As society becomes increasingly aware of the spread of antisemitism in all its contemporary forms, it is crucial that efforts are made to counteract these narratives and protect the safety and well-being of Jewish communities.

While dangerous forms of antisemitism are proliferating on other social media platforms as well, the CAM Antisemitism Research Center and NCRI are currently analyzing data from only Twitter, Reddit, and 4Chan.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In identifying the significant correlation that exists between hostile rhetoric on Twitter about Jewish houses of worship, and real-world incidents targeting synagogues across the United States, important steps must be taken by both policymakers and social media platforms to enhance the safety of the Jewish community.

1. To help prevent and identify potential downstream threats, social media platforms such as Twitter **should ensure their application programming interfaces (API) remain accessible** to research institutions, monitoring organizations, and law enforcement agencies. Doing so would allow for further research on the relationship between online antisemitic rhetoric and real-world incidents. Lawmakers should require greater levels of transparency from social media platforms to prevent the proliferation of antisemitism and violent acts of hate.

2. **Increase government funding for security measures** that can better guarantee the safety of synagogues, community centers, and schools. Federal, state, and local governments have a responsibility to guarantee the safety of synagogues and Jewish worshipers during an increasingly threatening environment.

3. **If you see something, say something**. Hateful conspiracies and violent acts of discrimination and intimidation have clearly entered the mainstream. The volume of hateful discourse on social media is nearly impossible to restrict altogether. The time has come for social media platforms to responsibly and actively monitor threatening rhetoric against minority communities and individuals. Platforms such as Twitter should hire dedicated personnel to monitor these threats, and establish appropriate mechanisms and channels to regularly share this information with law enforcement agencies charged with responding to threats. Subsequently, state and federal law enforcement agencies should dedicate internal resources to specifically assess potential threats and emerging trends in hateful conduct on social media platforms.

Appendix 1. A few examples of CAM research include:

1. **February 21: Portsmouth, New Hampshire**
   Surveillance cameras show a person wearing a red Maine sweatshirt and a facemask spray-painting graffiti on a synagogue in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

2. **February 15, 2023: Boone, North Carolina**
   Police in Boone, N.C., released images of a man they allege waved a flag with a swastika on it outside of the Temple of the High Country.

3. **January 30th, 2023: Bloomfield, New Jersey**
   An incident took place in which a firebomb was hurled toward a synagogue in the town over the weekend.

Appendix 2.

Figure 13: An antisemitic tweet by TheWhiteRabbit (36k followers on Twitter), a QAnon account, referencing the Synagogue of Satan in an antisemitic context.

Appendix 3.

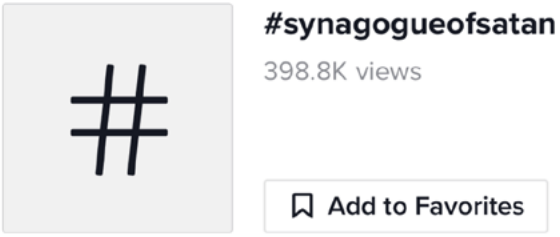

Figure 14: The hashtag synagogueofsatan has received over 398,800 views on Instagram.